Introducing the ACF Research and Evaluation Agenda
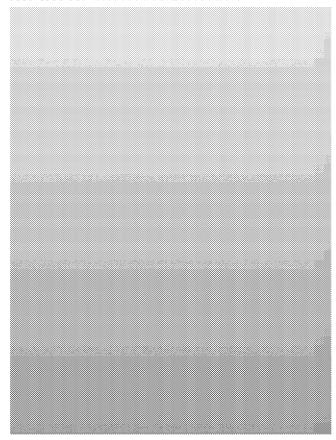
January 12, 2021 | Emily Schmitt and Camille Wilson

ACF Issues: Research & Evaluation

We are excited to share our first ACF Research and Evaluation Agenda!

For some time, ACF has been pursuing learning agendas and related activities at multiple levels. At the broadest level, ACF contributes to the HHS multi-year evidence plan and HHS annual evaluation plan required of cabinet agencies by the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (the Evidence Act). At the same time, ACF's Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation has been working closely with several individual ACF program offices to develop detailed learning agendas related to specific ACF programs.

This research and evaluation agenda draws upon the learning agendas being developed with ACF program offices and highlights priority questions; key past, ongoing, and future research and evaluation efforts; and major stakeholder engagement activities for each program.

The agenda covers research and evaluation activities and plans in nine ACF program areas:

- Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention and Sexual Risk Avoidance

- Child Care

- Child Support Enforcement

- Child Welfare

- Head Start

- Health Profession Opportunity Grants

- Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood

- Home Visiting
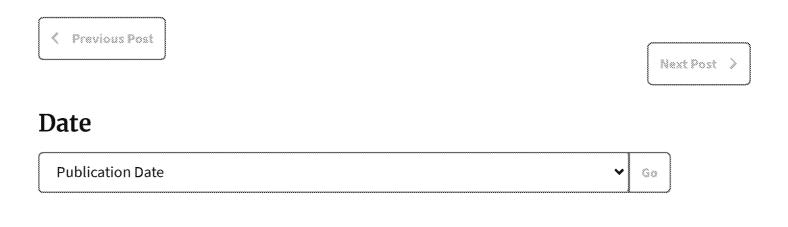
- Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency

For each program area, the agenda includes an overview of the program; a description of past research and evaluation activities; a discussion of stakeholder engagement; examples of broad questions and how those questions are being addressed by recent and ongoing research and evaluation; and a discussion of future directions. Each section also lists relevant measures by which programs monitor performance under the Government Performance and Results Act.

We are excited about this first ACF Research and Evaluation Agenda, and we are excited to expand and enhance it in future iterations. For example:

- While this agenda focuses on research and evaluation activities, we know that learning and continuous improvement require many types of evidence, including not only research and evaluation, but also systematic approaches to collecting and using performance data and program administrative data, among other learning activities. We hope to expand on this document to include these other types of learning that take place at ACF.

- This agenda focuses on nine ACF programs that currently have relatively robust research and evaluation portfolios. In future iterations, we hope to expand the scope of this agenda beyond these nine program areas, both by more comprehensively capturing the learning that is already happening across ACF, and to reflect increased agency-wide systematic learning.

- While this research and evaluation agenda reflects ongoing stakeholder feedback, as described in each of the program sections, we also invite additional feedback specifically on this document. We invite the public to share comments on specific program areas or on the agenda as a whole. Your feedback will inform future iterations of this agenda.

We hope that this document transparently conveys how past learning and ongoing stakeholder input inform our ongoing and future work; that it gives stakeholders a structured way to provide feedback on our research and evaluation agenda; and that it provides a framework that helps ACF continue to focus on learning questions of enduring importance while also meeting more immediate learning needs. As always, our ultimate

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goal is to build evidence that can be used to improve human services programs, and to better the lives of the children, families, and individuals that ACF serves.

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